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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of
Public Affairs

**Selected Speeches
and News Releases**

Jan. 4 - Jan. 7, 1993

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U.S. Department of Agriculture • Office of Public Affairs

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USDA TO RELEASE MITE-RESISTANT BEES TO SELECTED BREEDERS

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers are scheduled this spring to release honey bees from Yugoslavia that resist two mites now threatening the supply of bees needed to pollinate crops.

While USDA's Agricultural Research Service often distributes plant germplasm to be bred into new varieties, this is the first time the agency has ever released an insect as breeding stock, said Ralph Bram, the agency's national program leader for veterinary and medical entomology.

Bram said the agency's Honey Bee Breeding, Genetics and Physiology Laboratory in Baton Rouge, La., will release a stock of the Yugoslavian subspecies, *Apis mellifera carnica*, to several selected bee breeders. They will produce queens that will then be distributed to beekeepers. A Stock Release Panel, comprised of ARS and industry representatives, will choose specific breeders to maintain supplies of the bees, Bram said.

He said the Yugoslavian bees—first quarantined in this country in 1989 and later reared for field tests—"have reliable resistance to varroa and tracheal mites." Domestic bees lack this defense against the two mites that have caused extensive losses since they were discovered in the United States in the mid-1980s. The mites are considered a serious agricultural threat because bees pollinate billions of dollars worth of crops each year as they move among plants in search of nectar and pollen.

Thomas E. Rinderer, research leader of the Baton Rouge lab, said the Yugoslavian bees are twice as resistant to varroa mites as susceptible domestic bees, but would still require some chemicals to control severe outbreaks. But he said the resistance is so high for tracheal mites that chemical controls for that pest probably would not be needed. He estimated that the resistant stock could save beekeepers \$2 per colony in tracheal mite treatments.

Three chemicals are registered to control the mites: menthol and amitraz for tracheal mites, and fluvalinate for varroa. A fourth chemical, formic acid,

is pending approval for use against both mites.

Rinderer noted that chemical controls for mites “are costly and must be done carefully. We’re also concerned that the mites may develop resistance to the chemical controls.”

As an alternative to chemicals, ARS and Yugoslavian researchers in 1984 began a joint program to find genetic resistance to the mites, because bees in Yugoslavia were thought to have resistance to the mites. The research was initiated to find resistance to the varroa mite, *Varroa jacobsoni*, first discovered in Florida and Wisconsin in 1987. It attacks both immature and adult bees and—if unchecked—can quickly destroy a bee colony with few visual warnings, Rinderer said.

But researchers discovered an added bonus: the Yugoslavian bees also were resistant to the tracheal mite, *Acarapis woodi*, Rinderer said. He and Jovan Kulencevic, a geneticist in Yugoslavia, led the joint research project.

Tracheal mites were discovered in Texas in 1984 and have spread across the country. The mite lives, feeds and reproduces inside the bee’s breathing tubes, blocking oxygen flow and eventually killing the bee, Rinderer said. Since 1988, an estimated 50,000 or more colonies have been lost each year due to the tracheal mite.

To study the Yugoslavian bees’ resistance to the mites, the bees were brought to the United States in July 1989. They were kept for six months in a quarantine apiary on Grand Terre Island off the Louisiana coast, to make sure the bees had no dangerous diseases or parasites that could be spread to American honey bees. Once they were found to be safe, the bees were moved to the Baton Rouge lab. Field tests to study mite resistance began in 1990.

“Insect varieties have genetic traits that can benefit agriculture in the same way that different plant varieties have helped create crops with disease and insect resistance and other improvements,” Bram said. “Releasing the Yugoslavian breeding stock underscores how seriously we view the mites and that we’re committed to helping the bee industry solve the mite problem.”

Beekeepers interested in becoming breeders of the Yugoslavian stock should contact Rinderer.

NOTE TO EDITORS: For details, contact Ralph Bram, National Program Staff, USDA, ARS, Beltsville, Md. 20705. Telephone (301) 504-5771; Thomas Rinderer, Honey Bee Breeding, Genetics, and Physiology Research Lab, ARS, 1157 Ben Hur Road, Baton Rouge, La. 70894. Telephone (504) 766-6064.

CCC INTEREST RATE FOR JANUARY RAISED TO 3 3/4 PERCENT

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—Commodity loans disbursed in January by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation will carry a 3 3/4 percent interest rate, according to Keith Bjerke, executive vice president of the CCC.

The 3 3/4 percent rate is up from December's 3 5/8 percent and reflects the interest rate charged CCC by the U.S. Treasury.

Any outstanding 1981 and subsequent crop commodity loans and any outstanding facility loans approved and disbursed on or after April 1, 1981 and before Jan. 1, 1993, will accrue interest at a rate of 3 3/4 percent during 1993. This interest rate is subject to adjustment each Jan. 1.

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USDA REVISES REQUIREMENTS FOR INSPECTING SHOW HORSES

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced revised requirements for inspecting show horses under the Horse Protection Act.

The new regulations require inspection of each horse for its ability to move and turn and for lesions on the legs. If unusual movement or lesions are observed, then the inspector must examine the rear legs.

"The new procedures will better enable the inspectors to detect sore horses," said Dale F. Schwindaman, deputy administrator of the regulatory enforcement and animal care program the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

They will make inspections more practical for people who work in horse shows and sales while ensuring compliance with the Horse Protection Act.

APHIS certifies horse industry organizations to license individuals as Designated Qualified Persons to help enforce the Horse Protection Act. These DQPs conduct inspections of horses before and after the shows and sales in order to identify sore horses. APHIS inspectors monitor DQP procedures by also examining horses at selected shows.

In addition, the DQP is required to weigh and measure pads and devices on every horse during a horse show if visual inspection indicates that the pads and devices may not comply with the Act. DQPs must continue to weigh and measure the pads and devices of all first-place horses after the performance.

Under the revised requirements, DQPs may inspect horses up to three classes before a horse's performance. In smaller shows of less than 150 horses, a horse may not be inspected more than two classes ahead of the time of performance. These changes were made to facilitate coordination between inspections and the running of classes to prevent delays in the show. A horse has to stay within the view of the inspectors between the time of inspection and the time of performance.

So that horses waiting to be shown are adequately attended, the regulations now permit the trainer and the groom to be present in the holding area along with the rider, the DQP and the APHIS inspector.

Instead of hiring more than one DQP for relatively small horse shows, horse show managers now are required to hire a minimum of two DQPs only when more than 150 horses are present at a show.

The Horse Protection Act prohibits the showing, selling, exhibition or transport of sore horses. Soring is used to achieve or accentuate the highstepping action of gaited horses.

APHIS considered nearly 50 comments before publishing the final ruling. This final rule was published in the December 30, 1992 Federal Register and becomes effective on Jan. 29, 1993.

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USDA PROPOSES TO CHANGE ANIMAL DISEASE STATUS OF THE NETHERLANDS

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing to declare The Netherlands free of rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease. The Netherlands then would be able to transport cattle, other ruminants, and ruminant meat products to the United States subject to certain animal health restrictions.

Restrictions would be placed on the importation of meat products from ruminants because The Netherlands borders on countries considered by USDA to be infected with foot-and-mouth disease. It also imports live

animals and meat products from infected countries under less restrictive conditions than the United States.

“While The Netherlands has had no reported outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease since 1984 or rinderpest since 1870, we would still need some restrictions on its meat exports to ensure the safety of U.S. livestock,” said Billy G. Johnson, deputy administrator for veterinary services in USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

To minimize any risk to U.S. livestock, the proposal would require certification by Dutch animal health officials that uncooked meat products have been handled in a manner that prevents contact with meat from infected countries.

Swine and swine meat products from The Netherlands would remain prohibited because of the presence of hog cholera and swine vesicular disease in that country.

Notice of the proposal is scheduled for publication in the Jan. 5 Federal Register. Comments will be accepted if they are received on or before Feb. 4. An original and three copies of written comments referring to Docket 92-154-1 should be sent to Chief, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, USDA, Room 804 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Comments may be inspected at USDA, Room 1141-South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

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USDA PROPOSES COST-PER-HOUR FEES FOR PHYTOSANITARY CERTIFICATES

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing to allow states to charge hourly fees as an alternative to the current cost-per-certificate charge for phytosanitary certification of plants and unprocessed plant products for export.

“Because state employees issue almost half of all U.S. phytosanitary certificates, each state needs a convenient way to recoup its costs,” said B. Glen Lee, deputy administrator for plant protection and quarantine in USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. “We believe offering

the states the hourly alternative would encourage them to continue providing this service for exporters.”

APHIS is primarily responsible for inspecting plant exports and issuing phytosanitary certificates, but states play a critical role in helping APHIS carry out this function. Many importing countries require these documents, which indicate that the plant or plant product is considered free of pests and diseases that could threaten their agricultural production.

Notice of the proposal is scheduled for publication in the Federal Register Jan. 5. Comments will be accepted if they are received on or before March 8. An original and three copies of written comments referring to Docket Number 92-157-1 should be sent to Chief, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, USDA, Room 804 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Comments may be inspected as soon as received at USDA, Room 1141-S, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

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USDA TO PERMIT PLANTING OF 1993-CROP SOYBEANS ON OPTIONAL FLEXIBLE ACRES

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan today announced that soybeans may be planted on optional flexible acreage as allowed by the 1993 price support and production adjustment programs.

Producers may plant designated crops on acreage, known as “flexible” acreage, that does not exceed 25 percent of each crop acreage base enrolled in these programs, and the crops planted can be credited as “considered planted” to the program crop. The first 15 percent is called “normal flexible acreage” and the other 10 percent is called “optional flexible acreage”.

Deficiency payments will not be made to optional flexible acreage planted to a crop other than the crop for which acreage base has been established. However, producers who plant program crops or oilseeds on optional flexible acres may receive price support.

The secretary is required to prohibit the planting of soybeans on optional flexible acres if on Jan. 1 the estimated price of 1993-crop soybeans will be below 105 percent of the 1993 loan rate.

On Nov. 16 the national average price support loan level of \$5.02 per bushel was announced for the 1993 crop of soybeans. Since the price of soybeans is projected to be greater than \$5.27 a bushel (105-percent of the price support loan rate), soybeans may be planted on optional flexible acres, Madigan said.

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SCIENTISTS PROPOSE GLOBAL REPORT CARD ON SOIL QUALITY

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—A global network to monitor soil health is urgently needed, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist.

“There is nothing currently available that can measure and predict farming’s effects on all the key aspects of soil quality—soil productivity, environmental quality, food safety and quality and human health,” said James F. Parr of USDA’s Agricultural Research Service, Beltsville, Md.

Parr, who oversees ARS soil fertility research, said the global network would rate soil quality according to this broader index or report card. “It’s no longer just a question of measuring the traditional physical and chemical properties to predict crop yields,” he said.

Parr said the proposal was based on reports that he and other ARS scientists presented earlier at a soil quality conference sponsored by the Rodale Institute in Emmaus, Pa.

Sharon B. Hornick, an ARS soil scientist who has been an associate professor of human nutrition, urged that the index include the plant proteins, vitamins and trace minerals essential to human health. She said research is confirming that soil quality can dictate levels of these plant nutrients. She reported on greenhouse experiments at Beltsville showing that increasing soil fertilizer by a few pounds per 100 square feet can slash the vitamin C content of kale leaves by more than half.

Hornick is simulating human digestion to check how soil quality affects levels of vitamins and minerals that people absorb from eating the leafy vegetables.

She is also studying the effects of fertilization on beta carotene levels in new carrot varieties. The human body uses beta carotene to produce vitamin A.

Douglas L. Karlen, an ARS soil scientist in Ames, Iowa, said the best way to improve soil quality is by leaving unharvested plant parts on the ground. He said if there aren't enough leftovers, shredded newspapers and leaves will do.

He said the carbon in these materials feeds the beneficial bacteria and fungi that help plants use nitrogen and other nutrients. The microbes also break down unused nutrients and pesticides into harmless compounds. Carbon also feeds plant roots and fungi that help bind the soil, reducing erosion.

Other ways to improve soil quality, he added, include crop rotations and cover crops.

Karlen's ARS colleague, John W. Doran of Lincoln, Neb., is currently cooperating with Don Kaufman, an ARS senior scientist, in an on-farm composting project at Rodale using newspapers and other urban waste that are safe to recycle in soils.

NOTE TO EDITORS: For details, contact James F. Parr, National Program Leader, Dryland Agriculture and Soil Fertility, USDA, ARS, Beltsville, Md. 20705. Telephone (301) 504-8324.

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OHIO STORE OWNER SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS FOR FOOD STAMP FRAUD

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—A Toledo, Ohio, grocery store owner was sentenced today to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay \$3,513,436 in restitution for the illegal redemption of food stamps.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Inspector General Leon Snead said Michael K. Hebeka, 58, owner of the Ashland Market, was convicted last year in U.S. District Court in Toledo on two counts of illegal redemption of food stamps and one count of presentation of false claims to USDA.

Snead said the conviction represented the largest food stamp fraud case prosecuted in Ohio since the food stamp program began in 1964.

According to Snead, Hebeka had been convicted in 1984 of buying food stamps and subsequently was permanently disqualified by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service from participating in the food stamp program as a retail grocer. Following Hebeka's disqualification, a store employee presented

evidence to FNS that he had purchased the store from Hebeka, and the store was then reauthorized to accept food stamps. However, an investigation by USDA's Office of Inspector General disclosed that Hebeka never actually sold the store, and that he continued to use it to illegally redeem \$7.2 million in food stamps during the period between April 22, 1985, and May 23, 1991.

The investigation found that from August 1988 through May 1991, Hebeka's food stamp redemptions exceeded his total food sales by more than \$3.5 million.

Food stamps may only be used to purchase eligible food items at stores authorized to participate in the Food Stamp Program. It is illegal to exchange them for cash or other non-food items.

"The stiff sentence imposed in this case should send a clear message that the government will pursue the strongest penalties available against individuals who abuse this important benefit program," Snead said.

The case was prosecuted by U.S. Attorney Joyce J. George and Assistant U.S. Attorney Catherine H. Killam, Northern District of Ohio.

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USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET RICE PRICES

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—Acting Under Secretary of Agriculture Randall Green today announced the prevailing world market prices of milled rice, loan rate basis, as follows:

- long grain whole kernels, 8.63 cents per pound;
- medium grain whole kernels, 7.81 cents per pound;
- short grain whole kernels, 7.78 cents per pound;
- broken kernels, 4.32 cents per pound.

Based upon these prevailing world market prices for milled rice, loan deficiency payment rates and gains from repaying price support loans at the world market price level are:

- for long grain, \$1.31 per hundredweight;
- for medium grain, \$1.22 per hundredweight;
- for short grain, \$1.23 per hundredweight.

The prices announced are effective today at 3 p.m. EST. The next scheduled price announcement will be made Jan. 12 at 3 p.m. EST.

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USDA ANNOUNCES FINAL ARP FOR 1993-CROP UPLAND COTTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan today announced a final acreage reduction percentage of 7.5 percent for the 1993 crop of upland cotton.

The 1993 final ARP is the same as the preliminary ARP percentage announced Nov. 2, 1992.

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NEW CORN HAS RESISTANCE TO INSECT PEST

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6—New corn that reduces fall armyworm leaf damage by 25 percent has been released to plant breeders after more than a decade of development.

U.S. Department of Agriculture and university scientists developed the corn germplasm by screening several thousand plants from Mexico, the Caribbean and Brazil. USDA's Neil W. Widstrom said pest resistance traits of these plants were combined in the germplasm for breeding commercial hybrids that farmers can use to counteract fall armyworm larvae.

"The new germplasm will be particularly helpful in the South, where the armyworm causes the most problems," said Widstrom, a plant geneticist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Tifton, Ga. Scientists estimate the armyworm causes \$25 to \$30 million in damage to crops in the southeastern states each year.

ARS, the University of Georgia and Mississippi State University jointly released the germplasm, designated GT-FAWCC (C5). It has been under development since the late 1970s.

"To our knowledge, this is the first corn germplasm that has a broad genetic base along with resistance to the fall armyworm," said Widstrom. "One of the biggest concerns of breeders is corn's susceptibility because of its narrow genetic base," he said. "Our new release is an attempt to bring exotic germplasm into use, providing a wider genetic base for hybrids grown across the country."

“One plant of GT-FAWCC (C5) could be taller than another or have different seed color, for example, but all will have genes for resistance to the fall armyworm,” Widstrom said.

“We wanted to achieve a broad range of genetic variability to give breeders more flexibility,” Widstrom said. “They have a lot more latitude in how they can use this new germplasm in their breeding programs.”

He said a broad genetic base is important to guard against the type of problem that occurred in the early 1970s, when leaf blight caused massive damage to corn in the South. Since the hybrids grown had a narrow genetic background for resistance, when one hybrid became susceptible, nearly all succumbed to the blight and the disease spread rapidly across the southern corn belt.

If the corn had been genetically broader based, Widstrom said, it may have been better protected, reducing the extent of damage by the disease. GT-FAWCC (C5) matures in about 115 days, making it more suitable to the southern states than to the colder northern corn belt, Widstrom said. It also has good grain quality and better than average yield in hybrid combination with other corn lines—about 60 to 100 bushels an acre, comparable to many commercial hybrids now grown in the South.

Seed is available by writing Widstrom at the USDA-ARS Insect Biology and Population Management Research Lab, P.O. Box 748, Tifton, Ga. 31793

NOTE TO EDITORS: For details, contact Neil W. Widstrom, USDA-ARS Insect Biology and Population Management Research Lab, ARS, USDA, Tifton, Ga. 31793. Telephone (912) 387-2341.

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